

Do You Have An Optimal Learning Style?

As a teacher, coach or student, you have probably noticed the differences in the physical and mental abilities of your students or fellow learners. In 1983, **Howard Gardner** proposed that there are many different ways to demonstrate intellectual ability. In his theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) Gardner identifies the following eight intellectual abilities:



Kernodle

However, he suggests that individuals have different intellectual strengths and weaknesses and in order to optimize the teaching/learning environment for mental and/or motor skills, a teacher/coach must be able to identify and match to these abilities by utilizing highly corrected activities. Learners should be exposed to activities that utilize all of the eight intelligences, but a large portion of the instruction should be focused on the dominant learning styles.



Michell

Knowing one's own unique pattern of intelligences empowers a student to translate a difficult learning situation into an opportunity, to operate from strength. The employment of this concept will allow learners to be more adept at applying the knowledge and skills in different situations, rather than merely recalling the information.

This is the first in a series of four articles that explore Gardner's theory of MI as it pertains to coaching and playing tennis. Each article will analyze two of Gardner's identified multiple intelligences and provide examples of activities that can be used to address each intelligence. This article focuses on the Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence and the Visual/Spatial Intelligence.

How Would You Solve This Problem?

Driving to the U.S. Open, four friends get hopelessly lost by taking a shortcut off the main highway. Frantically, all four begin investigating how to get out of this disaster. Each person calls on his or her particular intellectual strength to find a way back to the main highway and get to the U.S. Open before the first match. The driver tries to recall the road numbers of each road taken. The navigator tries to locate the road on the map and find a way back to the highway. Another passenger tries to recall interesting structures and objects at each turn that could help them get back to the highway. And the last passenger calls for help using the cell phone. Each person in the car is different and thinks differently about how to get back on the correct highway to get to the U.S. Open. These differences in intellectual ability to solve the dilemma are typical, especially since no two people are exactly alike.

Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence

Individuals who are strong in the verbal/linguistic intelligence are capable of using words effectively. They learn most effectively by listening to verbal presentations, reading, writing, and discussing the material to be learned. They often think in words rather than pictures. Traditional teaching/coaching techniques favor these types of learners because, in sports, the teacher/coach verbally tells the athlete how to perform the skill correctly and then provides feedback in the same manner. Even though you are conditioned to the traditional method of instruction, verbal/linguistic intelligence can be more fully developed by offering a wider range of learning experiences when learning new motor skills and/or tactical concepts. This will then al-

low for a more successful transfer from a practice environment to competition. For example:

- **A - Z Tennis:** Learners are asked to associate different strokes and stroke components with letters of the alphabet. In the early learning stages lower case letters could be associated with components of complete skills. For example, 't' would stand for the toss in the serve and 'b' would stand for the back swing. As the skill level improves, the association could be between uppercase letters and a complete skill. For example, 'S' would stand for serve and 'B' would stand for backhand. When given the letter, the student should be able to verbally describe the technique needed to produce the movement associated with the letter.

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- **Tennis Journal:** Sometime, shortly after the on court experience, the learner should write down descriptions of what they have learned with regards to strokes and strategies.
- **Crossword Puzzle:** Develop a crossword puzzle that includes descriptions of strokes and strategies learned during on court lessons.
- **Coach Player Discussion:** Players view a videotape of a competitive match and when the tape is stopped they are asked to describe what they would do based upon the position of the players and the ball. Players could also be shown videotaped replay of inappropriate strokes and asked to describe what was incorrect and what corrections they would make. Players could be viewing a live match in the presence of a coach and be asked to describe the positive and negative aspects of the participant's performances.

Visual/Spatial Intelligence

Individuals who are strong in the visual/spatial

intelligence are able to perceive spatial relationships and tend to think in pictures or mental images. They learn most effectively through visual input, such as watching a model perform the skill or diagrams of the tactical concept. Traditional coaching techniques generally use live models and/or videotape replay. The following are examples of nontraditional methods:

- **Tennis Visual Aids:** Place representations of player positions on a tennis court diagram and ask players to determine the next strategic move.
- **Tennis Mental Practice:** The players create a mental image of either a specific stroke or a game play experience.
- **Cue Recognition:** Players are asked to write down, draw or demonstrate relevant cues as exhibited by other players either in a live environment or on videotape.

Self Analysis: Players are asked to view them-

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About the Authors

Michael Kernodle is an USPTA Master Professional and an Assistant Professor in Motor Learning and Motor Development at Appalachian State University. During his seven-year tenure as Appalachian State's men's tennis coach, he guided the team to a Southern Conference Championship in 1996 and was named the USPTA Southern Division College Coach of the Year in 1994. Dr. Kernodle is also a member of both the USTA and the ITA (Intercollegiate Tennis Association) sports science committees.

Mel Michell is an Assistant Professor in Physical Education at Appalachian State University. Dr. Michell teaches an Elementary Physical Education course that is based on the Multiple Intelligence Theory. Prior to coming to Appalachian State, she worked as an elementary physical educator and high school coach in Halifax County, VA.

V.C. At The Open

Who is number four on the USTA's 18 and under rankings, knew he was in for a tough match. And a tough match it was. Isner and Stewart traded blows for three sets with Isner delivering the knockout and advancing to the next round. His next opponent was top-seeded **Richard Gasquet**

Hall of Fame

Continued From Page 2

Andrews rejoined his childhood coach as a player at N. C. State and became a two-time All-American in both singles and doubles. From there, he entered the professional ranks and rose to a career high Association of Tennis Professionals ranking of #78 in singles and #19 in doubles.

Please look for full tennis biographies of Allen and Andrews in the November/December 2002 issue of *North Carolina Tennis Today*.

Learning

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selves on videotape and write down or demonstrate the positive and negative aspects of their stroke production or decision making.

It is important to keep in mind that using these activities is not meant to replace the actual production of the movement being learned, but is to enhance the learning process by stimulating the learning style most appropriate for each individual.

The next article will focus on Bodily/Kinesesthetic and Naturalist.

If I'm The Better Player, Why Can't I Win?

"Anyone who wants to win more tennis matches should read this book! It will definitely help you as a competitor." - Vic Braden

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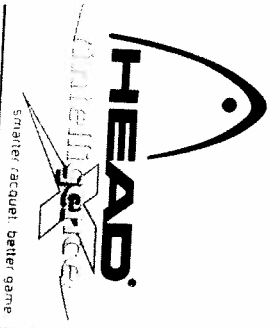
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